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AUTHOR Carter, Robert T.; Sedlacek, William E.
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ABSTRACT

Studies examining college students' drug use behavior have found that drug use has increased over the periods studied. To examine the attitudes and behaviors towards drugs of University of Maryland freshmen over a decade, 410 freshmen in 1973 and 491 freshmen in 1983 were administered an anonymous questionnaire. An analysis of the results showed that there was a significant decline, between 1973 and 1983, in incidence of use for 13 substances studied, except hard liquor, speed, heroin, and cocaine. There was also a decline in percent of regular use of most substances. For example, 33% regularly used marijuana in 1973, compared to 17% in 1983. Women were less likely than men to drink beer in 1973, but were more likely than men to smoke cigarettes and drink wine in 1983. Compared to 1973, 1983 students were more likely to feel that marijuana should not be legalized, and that someone found selling or using marijuana should be turned in to the proper authorities. Women were more likely than men to feel sorry for people on drugs and to be in favor of drug education programs. 1983 students were less supportive of drug education programs than 1973 students. (BL)

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SEX DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR TOWARD DRUGS OVER A DECADE

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SUMMARY

Freshmen entering UMCP in 1973 (N=410) and 1983 (N=491) were administered an anonymous questionnaire on their attitudes and behavior toward drugs. Results show that there was a significant decline in incidence of use for 13 substances studied between 1973 and 1983 except hard liquor, speed, heroin, and cocaine. There was also a decline in percent of regular use of most substances. For example, 33% regularly used marijuana in 1973, compared to 17% in 1983. Women were less likely to drink beer than men in 1973, but in 1983 were more likely to smoke cigarettes and drink wine than men. Compared to 1973, 1983 students were more likely to feel that marijuana should not be legalized and that if the university found someone selling or using marijuana they should be turned in to the proper authorities. Women were more likely to feel sorry for people on drugs and be in favor of drug education programs. 1983 students were less supportive of drug education programs than 1973 students. Other differences by year and sex are presented and implications are discussed.

The 1960's and 1970's were turbulent decades for the United States. The civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, and defiant socio-political protest, primarily from college students, marked the period. During this era, as noted by Minatoya and Sedlacek (1979), "...the American college student was frequently viewed by the public as alienated from the traditional societal mores, and was associated with political dissent, divergent life styles, and illicit drug use." (p.1).

Of particular concern to administrators and student affairs personnel was the use and abuse of various substances. Consequently, researchers directed their efforts toward understanding the drug user's attitudes and behaviors and the influence and frequency of use of particular substances (Allen and West, 1968; Blum, 1969; Dickerson, 1969; U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1971).

Horowitz and Sedlacek (1973), in their review of drug attitude research, observed that "...drug use among students is increasing and students use different drugs to varying degrees" (p.3). Howard and Sedlacek (1975), in a comparison of previous studies on student attitudes and use of a variety of drugs, found marijuana was tried by more students than in previous years, yet fewer regular marijuana users were found. Males used marijuana, cocaine, and beer more frequently, while females tried speed more frequently. Students reported using drugs to get high and feel good. They were in favor of coming to the counseling center for drug related problems, but not in favor of attending a drug education program.

More recently, researchers have tended to look at the psychological reasons for use or non-use of drugs, often focusing on a particular substance (e.g. marijuana) (Fago and Sedlacek, 1975; Pope, Ionescu-Pioggia, and Cole, 1981; Toohey, Dezelsky, and Balfi, 1982; Wright and Moore, 1982).

Other studies (Dezelsky, Toohey, and Kush, 1981; Fago and Sedlacek, 1976; Lester and Leach, 1982; Wakefield, 1982) have examined college students' drug use behavior over various time periods. In general, these investigations have found that drug use had increased over the periods studied. For example, Lester

and Leach (1982) conducted a drug survey on a similar sample in 1970 and 1980, and found marijuana use had increased more for women than men, and alcohol and other drug use also had increased for women. In another ten year study (1970-1980) of non-medical drug use on five college campuses, Dezelsky, Toohey, and Kush (1981) found both the proportion of students who discontinued marijuana use and the proportion of students who used marijuana regularly increased over time. Dezelsky et al. also found that alcohol use at the same five campuses was high.

The literature on students and drugs raises some key questions that require further study. Have the trends observed in the literature continued? Or have student drug attitudes and behaviors reached a plateau? Study methodologies and sampling techniques have varied, and comparability has been hard to achieve over time. Would the same results be found if methodology were better controlled?

The purpose of the present study was to respond to these and related questions by studying a single campus, using an identical method, over a ten year period.

Method

An anonymous questionnaire examining behavior and attitudes toward drugs was administered to random samples of 410 (52% male and 48% female) incoming freshmen in 1973 and to 491 (52% male and 48% female) incoming freshmen in 1983 at the University of Maryland, College Park. Students were administered the questionnaires in large classroom settings as part of an orientation program, and conditions were identical in both years.

The data were analyzed by Chi square and analysis of variance. All results reported were signficant at the .05 level.

Results

Incidence of use (percent reported ever used):

Year Differences:

Table 1 shows that there was a signficant decline in incidence of use for

all substances except hard liquor, speed, heroin, and cocaine between 1973 and 1983. Beer, wine, hard liquor, and cigarette smoking showed little change from 1973 to 1983. Heroin was rarely used in 1973 and never used in 1983. Use of barbituates (downers) also declined dramatically, from 18% in 1973 to 9% in 1983. Also declining over the decade was incidence of use of marijuana (52% in 1973 to 44% in 1983) and hashish (35% in 1973 to 22% in 1983). The two substances showing an increase in incidence were speed (16% to 23%) and cocaine (8% to 14%).

Sex Differences

Women, compared to men, showed a significantly lower incidence of use of beer in 1973 (86% vs. 92%), marijuana in 1973 (47% vs. 55%), and 1983 (42% vs. 49%) and hashish in 1983 (18% vs. 26%). However, women reported a significantly higher incidence of use of speed in 1973 (18% vs. 13%) and cigarettes in 1983 (63% vs. 49%) than men.

Frequency of Use (how often used drug):

Year Differences

Table 2 compares frequent (once a month or more) and infrequent (a few times to once) users by year. Of the 13 substances shown, 7 were used infrequently in both years, and the drugs that were used regularly showed sharp decline in percentage of regular use. For example, marijuana declined in percentage of students reporting regular use (33% in 1973 to 17% in 1983).

The substances with the highest percentage of regular use were beer (56%-1973; 64%-1983) and hard liquor (31%-1973; 40%-1983).

Sex Differences

Women, compared to men, were less likely to drink beer in 1973 (41% vs. 28% infrequent; 45% vs. 64% frequent), but in 1983 were more likely to smoke cigarettes (39% vs. 34% infrequent; 47% vs. 31% frequent) and drink wine (42% vs. 52% infrequent; 51% vs. 38% frequent) than men.

Reasons for use and non-use:

Year Differences

No significant differences in students' reasons for using or not using drugs were found between 1973 and 1983. The most common reasons for use were to get high or feel good, to be more sociable, and to relieve tension or anxiety.

Sex Differences

There were significant differences between male and female reasons for not using drugs in the 1973 sample only (see Table 3).

Men cited reports of harmful psychological and physical effects and difficulty in obtaining substances as their main reasons for non-use, while women cited fear of becoming addicted, observations of effects of others, and no desire to experience its effects as main reasons for non-use.

Attitudes:

Year Differences

Of the 16 attitude items on the questionnaire, 12 were significant by year and one on the interaction of year and sex (Table 4). Compared to 1973, students in 1983 were more likely to feel that marijuana should not be legalized, and that if they or the university found someone using or selling marijuana or other drugs, they should be turned in to the proper authorities. 1983 students were also less likely to feel sorry for people on drugs, and were less likely to support a drug counseling service or to attend a drug education program than were 1973 students. In data not tabled, students tended to agree that they would attend the university counseling center for drug counseling both in 1973 and 1983.

Sex Differences

Five items were significantly different on sex (Table 4). Women were more likely to feel sorry for people on drugs, and to support a drug counseling service and attend a drug education program. Women were also less sure the university should turn over students who sell "other drugs," and felt stronger than males that the

same laws should not apply to alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana. The one item showing an interaction between year and sex shows that women were nearly as willing to attend a drug education program in 1973 and 1983, but men were much less interested in attending in 1983 compared to 1973.

Discussion

It is apparent that drug use in general is on the decline, with the exception of alcohol and beer, and cigarettes for women. Student attitudes appear to be more conservative than in the past, although women are more tolerant than men and more supportive of campus programming. However, the findings do not suggest that our concerns for the use of drugs should diminish. Since the social sanctions for drinking appear more tolerant than for other substances in spite of changes in legal drinking ages, students may rediscover alternatives to drinking (i.e. other illegal substances) or simply defy the law and drink anyway. Research which continues to explore these and related topics is clearly called for.

There appear to be many implications for campus programming. The differential use and attitude patterns of women must be considered in developing any education or counseling program on campus. Separate programs for men and women might be considered because of these differences. For example, a program aimed at reducing cigarette smoking among women might be useful. Also, since the results clearly show that students are more comfortable reporting others using or selling drugs, a drug counseling and education program which stresses the ways one may help the university and its students by watching for problems on campus while respecting the rights and responsibilities of others may be useful.

Our final thought is the reminder that drug behavior and attitudes are a complex and dynamic topic not given to simple statements or conclusions. We cannot make assumptions about students without continuing to gather data and being willing to act on it. How well this is done may be the oversimplified criterion for success for the student personnel profession.

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Table 1

Incidence (% ever used) for 13 Substances by year*

Substance	1973 %	1983 %
Beer	91	90
Hard Liquor	74	76
Wine	92	91
Cigarettes	57	56
Marijuana	52	44
Hashish	35	22
Speed	16	23
Downers	18	9
Mescaline	10	2
LSD	10	3
DMT	5	4
Cocaine	8	14
Heroin	2	0

*Differences significant at .05 using Chi square.

Table 2

Frequency* of use of 13 Substances by year**

Substance	1973		1983	
	% infrequent	% frequent use	% infrequent	%frequent use
Beer	35	56	26	64
Hard Liquor	43	31	37	40
Wine	41	47	47	44
Cigarettes	21	37	46	30
Marijuana	19	33	29	17
Hashish	23	15	18	4
Speed	14	2	19	3
Downers	14	2	8	0.7
Mescaline	9	1	2	0
LSD	9	1	1	2
DMT	4	1	0.4	0
Cocaine	7	1	11	3
Heroin	2	0.4	0	0

*Frequent=once a month or more; infrequent=a few times to once

**Differences significant at .05 using Chi square

Table 3

Reasons for Non-use of Drugs by Sex*

Item	1973	
	Males %	Females %
Reports (or experiences) of harmful psychological effects	75	25
Reports (or experiences) of harmful physical effects	62	8
Observations of effects on others	42	58
Urging or potential disapproval from parents, friends, etc.	46	54
Illegality	50	50
Difficulty in obtaining substance	60	40
No desire to experience its effects	44	56
Afraid of becoming addicted	25	75

*Significant at .05 using Chi square

Table 4

Means* and Standard Deviations on Attitude Items Significantly Different by Year or Sex

Item	1973 Men Mean	1973 Men SD	1973 Women Mean	1973 Women SD	1983 Men Mean	1983 Men SD	1983 Women Mean	1983 Women SD	Differences Significant**
1. Marijuana should be legalized.	2.40	1.28	2.62	1.26	3.62	1.14	3.63	1.05	Y
2. If I were aware of someone using marijuana, I would report him to the proper authorities.	4.33	.90	4.27	.87	3.96	.95	4.01	.90	Y
3. If I were aware of someone using other drugs, I would report him to proper authorities.	3.90	1.00	3.92	.99	3.77	.98	3.78	.98	Y
4. If I were aware of someone selling marijuana, I would report him to the proper authorities.	3.73	1.25	3.62	1.24	3.42	1.19	3.47	1.14	Y
5. I would not attend a drug education program on campus.	3.25	1.07	3.29	1.07	2.76	.99	3.13	1.02	Y, S, YxS
6. A drug counseling service should be provided for the students.	1.72	.87	1.52	.72	1.88	.79	1.70	.72	Y, S
7. The Student Government Association should fund a drug counseling center.	2.28	.98	2.03	.92	2.32	.80	2.20	.84	S
8. I do not feel sorry for people on drugs.	3.10	1.19	3.33	1.11	2.88	1.04	3.18	1.10	Y, S
9. If the University has knowledge of a student using marijuana, they should turn him over to the proper authorities.	3.97	1.03	3.83	1.11	2.91	1.07	2.87	.99	Y
10. If the University has knowledge of a student using other drugs, they should turn him over to the proper authorities.	3.26	1.19	3.33	1.21	2.60	.99	2.58	.95	Y
11. If the University has knowledge of a student selling marijuana, they should turn him over to the proper authorities.	3.33	1.34	3.21	1.32	2.25	1.06	2.23	.95	Y
12. If the University has knowledge of a student selling other drugs, they should turn him over to the proper authorities.	2.46	1.30	2.67	1.27	2.00	.95	2.10	.93	Y, S
13. The same laws that apply to alcohol and tobacco should apply to marijuana.	2.42	1.35	2.72	1.41	3.45	1.21	3.52	1.12	Y, S

* 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree

** Significant at .05 using analysis of variance, Y=year; S=sex; YxS=interaction